



NEWSLETTER

President's Pen

April 2026

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Dear Piedmont University Community,

Spring is blooming all around us, students and faculty are gearing up for their last push towards finals week, and I want to encourage each of you as we approach the last few weeks of the semester to stay focused and finish strong.

Meanwhile, there are still many opportunities to support our students and faculty before graduation arrives in a few weeks. Among them are three upcoming music concerts, a theatre production, a host of athletic competitions, and Alumni Weekend, including the Clay & Cuisine fundraiser for the Piedmont Arts Circle (formerly FOTA) with Holden Oversoul Restaurant & Oyster Bar in downtown Demorest.

I hope you will take advantage of the myriad campus offerings as the clock winds down on a successful semester's end.

Sincerely,
Marshall M. Criser, III

Piedmont Graduate Headed to Top Public Affairs Program at University of Georgia

by Grace Wills



To those who know her, Erin Ervin's success is no surprise. As a senior criminal justice major with political science and forensic science minors, Erin has made an impression on many professors as a smart and driven student. Outside the classroom, Erin's leadership achievements include being President of the Student Government Association; when Erin shared that she received a graduate assistantship for the University of Georgia Master of Public Administration (MPA) program, her Piedmont family was thrilled — but not surprised. "In my 18 years at Piedmont University, Erin is my first student to go on to The University of Georgia for a Master of Public Administration," said Dr. Tony Frye. "When she informed me

that she wanted to apply to the program, she was already prepared with her application, the questions she had about the program, housing, and assistantships. This is not a surprise to me because she is always prepared in all of my classes. The University of Georgia is going to be getting a great graduate student."

Not only is the university getting a great student, Erin is also joining a great program. UGA's MPA is ranked #7 in the country, and alumni go on to take top roles in government, consulting, public safety, and more. No doubt, with her success as an undergraduate student combined with new opportunities in graduate school, Erin will soon be a leader herself.

Her secret to success at Piedmont? "Don't be afraid to reach out to professors," she says. "Build that relationship." Indeed, she lists Professors Lanneau, Bowers, Frye, Wiltse, Franklin, and Teutsch as critical to her success in the graduate admissions process. She also gave a shoutout to Dr. Kim Crawford, whose encouragement to join clubs led Erin to make friends and develop leadership skills. Congratulations to Erin, her loved ones, and all of the faculty and staff who helped her along the way! We are so proud and thrilled to see what comes next.



After DC Conference, Piedmont Faculty Take First-Gen Message to Tulane

by Tad MacMillan & Angela Brown

At a professional learning conference at Tulane University in New Orleans, it was clear the focus of Tulane's faculty's mission has shifted toward a demographic that represents both a new challenge and a profound opportunity: their university's first-generation college students. Supporting First Gen students is a newer challenge for the faculty at Tulane, which had a 37% increase in First Gen students for the 24-25 academic year. The conference featured two visiting professors from Piedmont University, Angela Brown and Tad MacMillan, whose recent presentation at a national higher education Teaching Professors conference in Washington, D.C. in June caught the attention of Tulane leadership.

After the D.C. conference, Dr. Brown and Professor MacMillan were invited to Tulane to talk to their faculty about ways to demystify the "hidden curriculum" of higher education in an effort to better support First Gen students. Piedmont University has worked hard to develop an approach that supports First Gen students and Dr. Brown has been a leader in that effort. Tulane sought to bring that expertise directly to their own faculty.



The two visiting scholars have both worked diligently to broaden their efforts at supporting First Gen at Piedmont, and they were honored to be asked to share some of their ideas. In their session, they detailed how "belongingness" serves as the primary predictor of success for students who are the first in their families to attend college. They also discussed their efforts to address both specific ways to ensure that First Gen students feel welcomed and supported AND ways to develop First Gen students' sense of autonomy and personal efficacy as college students.

Research on First Gen students highlight the fact that they often lack the familial "roadmap" that legacy students rely on. Both at Piedmont and in their presentations in Washington, D.C. and at Tulane, Professor Brown and MacMillan aim to support an institutional perspective that sees First-Gen status as a unique asset of resilience and drive, instead of as a deficit.

The presentation served as a bridge between the distinct yet complementary efforts of Piedmont and Tulane. Both institutions are currently deep in the process of scaling their efforts. Piedmont has gained regional acclaim for its SAIL (Start, Achieve, Impact, Lead) Mentorship Program. This initiative prioritizes first-generation and low-income students by providing Early Immersion, Peer-to-Peer Support, and the teaching of soft skills. Tulane, recently selected for the prestigious FirstGen Forward Network, has launched the TU Thrive initiative. Brown and MacMillan's presentation focused on how faculty can modify their syllabus language and office hour structures to be more inclusive. As one of the visiting professors noted, "Supporting First Gen students isn't just about extra resources; it's about changing the culture of the classroom so that every student feels they were invited to the table, not just allowed in the room." By presenting at conferences, Professors Brown and MacMillan are seeking bi-directional benefits, supporting the work of other professors at other universities while honing their own efforts in their classrooms at Piedmont. The goal is to ensure that being "the first" in First Gen means the first of many to attend our university!



PAL Games Return for Ninth Year as Piedmont Partners with Local Elementary Schools



by Joseph Garwood



For the ninth year, Piedmont University was proud to hold the PAL Games (Piedmont Athletic Lions Games), a special day of competition and camaraderie for students, staff and local elementary school students with special needs.

This year, the event took place on Thursday, March 19 inside Cave Arena to continued success. The student-led event was organized by Ann Sutton, the Assistant Vice President for Advancement and Development at Piedmont.

"This is one of the most meaningful events we host each year," said Piedmont Director of Intercollegiate Athletics Jamie Purdy. "It's a great opportunity for our student-athletes to connect with the community and create a fun, welcoming environment for these kids. Days like this are what Piedmont Athletics is all about." Each elementary school student was paired up with a Piedmont 'pal' for the event. The activities included lacrosse, basketball, soccer, minion bowling, and a new favorite, the balance beam.

Piedmont athletics played a major role in the event, as Assistant Director of Athletic Communications Eric Edmonson provided live PA while Lindsay Dilbeck, an assistant professor in the health science department, led the always popular group dances.

Two Piedmont student athletes, Hannah Thompson from Piedmont women's soccer and Nathan Jacome from Piedmont men's soccer offered perspective on what makes the day special for them. "Being a part of this is super important to me," said Thompson. "It's a great way for the kids to get out and do something active and all be winners."



Piedmont men's soccer player Nathan Jacome has had the same 'pal' for three straight years and the hardest part of the day is when he and his 'pal' have to part ways.

"It's very special to me, and I'm blessed to be a part of this. It's great to see all of these kids and students bonding together," said Jacome.

The event continues a growing commitment from Piedmont students and athletes to both become and stay involved with the local community while making a difference in the lives of those around them. These students give back to the local schools and extend their love for sports and their educational studies.



Calm Under Pressure: Piedmont Graduate Tristan Rowell Finds Her Calling in Critical Care

by Terrie Ellerbee



In a neuro intensive care unit, time feels suspended. Monitors hum softly. Conversations are quiet but urgent. Families wait for updates while nurses and physicians watch closely for even the smallest change. In those moments, technical skill matters — but so does reassurance. Patients and families need someone who can combine knowledge with steadiness, translating complex medical information into understanding. For nurse Tristan Rowell, providing that calm presence is exactly why she chose healthcare.

“My decision to pursue nursing came from a desire to combine science with compassion in a way that makes a tangible difference in people’s lives,” she said.

Her inspiration began early. Rowell grew up watching her stepfather, a firefighter, respond to emergency calls and saw firsthand how professionalism and empathy could shape people’s most frightening moments.

“I witnessed how calmness, quick thinking, and compassion could profoundly impact people during vulnerable situations,” she said. “That sparked my desire to serve others in a meaningful way.”

At Piedmont University, that calling took form. Rowell earned a Bachelor of Science in Nursing as well as a bachelor’s degree in interdisciplinary studies with minors in chemistry and Spanish. She chose Piedmont for its close-knit environment and mentorship from faculty.

“The supportive academic environment allowed me to grow both personally and professionally,” she said. “Through clinical rotations and hands-on learning, I built confidence and critical-thinking skills while learning the importance of compassion, integrity, and patient-centered care.”

Her experiences on campus extended beyond the classroom. As a member of the cross-country team, she developed discipline and perseverance through early practices and competition. A study trip to Spain broadened her cultural awareness and strengthened her ability to communicate with Spanish-speaking patients — a skill she now uses in her daily work.

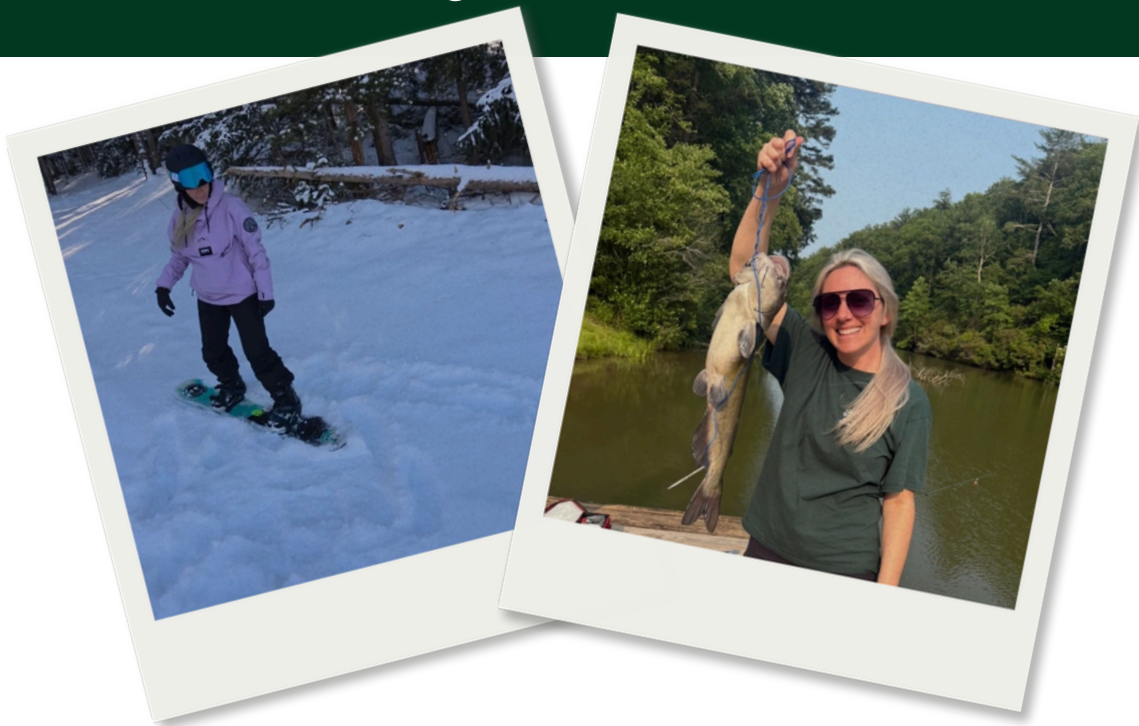
After graduation, Rowell entered one of the most demanding areas of nursing. She has worked in both a Neuro ICU and the emergency department and has also served as a travel nurse in ER settings.

“In the Neuro ICU, patients can change quickly, sometimes with only subtle signs,” Rowell said. “It pushes you to understand the ‘why’ behind every assessment. Recognizing even a small change can significantly impact a patient’s outcome.”



Calm Under Pressure: Piedmont Graduate Tristan Rowell Finds Her Calling in Critical Care, cont.

by Terrie Ellerbee



Emergency care brings a different type of challenge.

"In the ER, every shift is unpredictable," she said. "You have to think quickly, prioritize immediately, and stay calm under pressure. The teamwork is incredible — everyone supports each other during high-stress situations."

The work can be emotionally demanding, particularly when caring for patients with severe injuries or uncertain outcomes. But Rowell says those experiences reinforce her purpose.

"These environments have strengthened my resilience and deepened my commitment to providing calm, compassionate care," she said.

She credits her Piedmont education with preparing her for those realities.

"I learned not just how to perform skills, but why they matter," she said. "That foundation helps when caring for critically ill patients whose conditions can change rapidly."

Rowell continues to build advanced clinical experience while pursuing long-term goals of becoming a Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist and eventually a flight nurse. Her advice for current students is rooted in a lesson she still carries with her.

"One of my professors told me, 'Always remember your why,'" she said. "Nursing is challenging, but incredibly rewarding. Stay curious, embrace opportunities to learn, and prioritize compassion and resilience."

Outside the hospital, Rowell enjoys fishing, kayaking, snowboarding, traveling, gardening, cooking, and refinishing antique furniture — creative pursuits that help balance a demanding profession.

Whether in an emergency department or a critical care unit, her purpose remains the same: being present for people during the moments they need it most.

For Rowell, nursing is not only a career. It is the place where preparation, compassion, and purpose meet.

Calendar of Events

APRIL

4/14 Piedmont University String Orchestra

4/15 Disaster Drill

4/16-19- Theatre: And Then There Were None

4/17 Accepted Students Day

4/25 Great Composers Concert

4/25 Alumni Weekend

4/28 Piedmont University Chamber Ensembles

MAY

5/8 Commencement

5/25 Memorial Day Holiday

JUNE

6/12 Summer Orientation #1

6/15 Triple Threats Musical Theatre Intensive

6/15 ARTime '26

6/26 Summer Orientation #2

For event details, or to view the full calendar, please visit [here](#).

Clay & Cuisine 2026

Chef Jamie Allred and Piedmont University ceramic students have teamed up to present this dinner at Piedmont's Mason-Scharfenstein Museum of Art. Each guest will get a ceramic goblet souvenir (one for each guest), & music in the plaza by Piedmont alumnus Ethan Phillips. This is a fundraiser to support Piedmont University Friends of the Arts.

MENU:
 (SERVED IN HAND-MADE CERAMIC BOWLS, AVAILABLE TO PURCHASE)
 -Pork Rinds & Fried Pita w/ Pimento Cheese
 -SMF Chicken Brunswick Stew
 -BBQ Black Bean Stew (Vegetarian)
 -GF Cornbread
 -Banana Pudding
 *Drop In event
 *Non Alcohol Tickets \$40
 *Child's Ticket \$15
 *Purchase ASAP in advance, event is limited to 100 tickets

25
 April 2026
 5:00 - 7:00pm
 \$50
 1 Drink Included (Additional alcohol available)

LIVE MUSIC
 Ethan Phillips

To purchase tickets go to: www.holdenoversoulfarm.com

About the Artist

Ethan Phillips, a Piedmont University alum, is a singer/songwriter from Clayton, Georgia. Growing up in the Northeast Georgia Mountains, he was heavily influenced by country, gospel, and bluegrass music. As he got older, his passion for songwriting became instrumental; leading to a move to Nashville in December of 2019.

Phillips was a part of the 2018 Grand Ole Opry's WSM Radio Road Show. He has also been spotlighted on the historic, nationally-broadcast radio show, Ernest Tubb's Midnight Jamboree. Since he has lived in Nashville, he has had music featured on television shows like RFD-TV and Larry's Country Diner, while also having cuts with various emerging artists. Phillips frequently performs around Nashville and abroad including opening for acts such as Sawyer Brown.





We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to our Yonahian Society and donors. Your generosity and support have made a significant impact on Piedmont University. Your contributions have enabled us to continue our work, reach our goals, and make a positive difference in the lives of those we serve.

Thank You

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